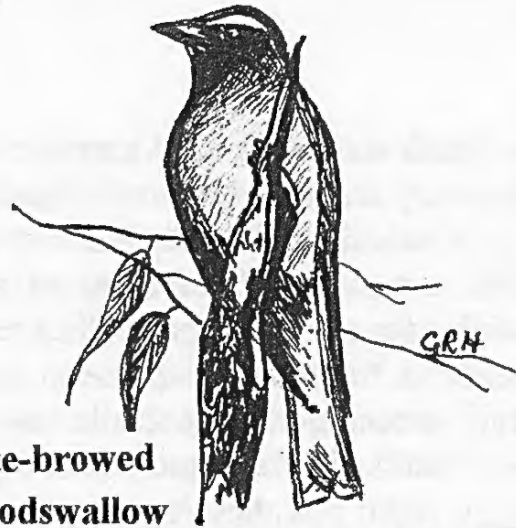


Castlemaine Naturalist

November 2006

Vol. 31.10 #338



White-browed
Woodswallow

Castlemaine Field Naturalists - 2006 - Celebrating 30 years

Birding in the Mallee – Rita Mills

On the afternoon of September 22 Maggie Oliver and I set off for Mildura, taking the road through Maldon, Serpentine and Swan Hill. The main birds we saw while travelling seemed to be Magpies, Galahs, and Ravens. Even Willie Wagtails were in short supply. In fact, we didn't see one until Lake Boga itself. Strong winds, and some rain didn't help, either.

We stayed overnight at Lake Boga and in the morning, before driving off in warm sunshine, we watched Pelicans and Little Black Cormorants rounding up fish for breakfast on the lake.

Even where we stopped on the Murray we didn't see a lot of birds, though during lunch beside the river at Euston we were kept amused by honeyeaters and pardelotes in the trees above us.

We took our time and arrived in Mildura at 2.30pm, half an hour too early to check into the student quarters at the TAFE College. Twenty-four BOCA birdos aged from 13 to considerably older were all anticipating five days of interesting birding.

The program was a full one with the Sunday excursion out to the Millewa. We detoured around paddocks and lakes, where we saw Avocets all tails up in the shallow water. In strong winds and raised dust, just after the lake we could hardly see ahead of us, but that was quickly followed up by rain. Just as well the local who was the leader knew where he was going because I had no idea where we were until we got back onto the Redcliffs/Millewa road on our way to the Mallanbool Flora and Fauna Reserve. I had been there some years earlier with a WVFNCA camp, and the difference in a drought year was all too obvious, but nevertheless it was an enjoyable hour or two we spent wandering around there, and we got a quite respectable bird list. We found the endemic Twin-flower Emu-bush still with some flowers, but mainly with the sepals, which look like more flowers, still present.

After lunch we set out for Merringur along back roads. As we reached the corner of Carwarp and Bambill South Roads the convoy stopped. Someone had spotted Major Mitchell Cockatoos. The rest missed them, but just around the corner we spotted a raptor and were out of the cars again. That stop was one of the highlights for me as we trained our binocs to where the raptor had disappeared in the trees at the top of the rise to see hundreds of Galahs perched among the foliage, preening and generally enjoying the sunshine catching their brilliant colour. Suddenly the raptor, which proved to be a Black Falcon, made a dive amongst them and they rose into the air - with the two Major Mitchells among them. I don't think the falcon was successful, as it flew off past us, and was replaced by a Nankeen Kestrel which was hunting nearer to us. Other birds we saw there included a Pied Butcherbird and Mallee Ringnecks.

On Monday we crossed the river and headed for Wentworth where we met our leader, and were shown around his garden on the bank of the Darling. It seemed full of birds, particularly Little Friarbirds, Blue-faced Honeyeaters and Mallee Ringnecks. We were taken around back roads to see White-winged Wrens and Chestnut-crowned Babblers, then to Thegoa Lagoon where the main interest was a large Goanna. We were also taken to the confluence of the Murray and Darling Rivers where Little Black Cormorants and Darters were nesting in full view across the river on the island.

A good source of bird life was the Sewerage Ponds and the Dareton ones were the first visited. We had lunch there (being the last pond it wasn't *too* pong-y) and saw numbers of birds including a Sacred Kingfisher and dozens of Little Corellas but two Wood Ducks, seen through the binocs sitting on a stick in the middle of the pond and reflected perfectly in the still water, is a sight I will remember for many a day. Later we were taken out to crown land which is the equivalent of covenanted land as I understand, where we were eaten alive by mosquitos - no one could make out where they had come from as it was quite dry out there - and met up with another local birdo who knew where to find the local Gilbert's Whistlers and White-fronted Honeyeaters, among other birds.

On the way back to Mildura some of us went to visit Morquong Swamp where a Red-backed Kingfisher was added to the growing list. It was here we got a good view of White-winged Wrens. The blue of these males was almost a navy-blue.

On Tuesday we went south east of the city to Lake Cardross and the associated Belah woodland where we added Black-eared Cuckoo to the list. I was off on my own, and didn't join the group that was following it for about 20 minutes until the last minute, but at least I saw it. I also found the Chestnut-crowned Babblers which were resident when I camped with BOCA at Lake Cardross some ten years or so ago. As we got back to the cars someone spotted another White-winged Wren, but this time the blue was a strong cobalt blue.

Our leader took us to several varied spots from lakeside, savannah woodland and finishing at the Mildura Sewerage ponds. There we found Blue-billed Ducks and more Yellow Rosellas among the list of 28 birds seen just at that one area.

Wednesday we were taken out to Kings Billabong, which is just a short drive from the town. On the way we passed, among all the green lawns and flower beds, a house that had an absolutely stunning landscaped garden using gravel, stones, Aloes, Cacti and other succulents, as well as other dry area plants. It was beautifully designed and must look magnificent when the cacti are in flower.

On the way to the billabong we were taken to a Sparrow-hawk nest (the family had left the nest by that time) which was in the front garden of our day's leaders, and to see a Tawny Frogmouth on a nest in their son's front garden!

At our stop near the lookout we found Variegated Wrens, and at the last stop a bird feeding on the ground proved to be a Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo, which we watched for some minutes before it flew off.

The afternoon was free, and the Inland Botanical Gardens were recommended as a place to visit - I'm afraid that Maggie and I just crashed after lunch and had a much-needed snooze.

Thursday was a day of sandy roads and over-warm (for me), lovely and warm (for Maggie) sunshine, and was the day someone found a Spotted Nightjar. Quite a time was spent trying to find it again among the Mallee and Porcupine Grass, but it was smart enough to stay hidden. Trentham Cliffs Station is a place I have been to a couple of times, including in 1979 WVFNCA Campout, and it was there, in the company of Frank Meyer that I saw my first Splendid Wrens and Red-capped Robins, but a lot of what was then Mallee scrub is now open wheat paddocks, but I still enjoyed visiting again. A half-hour visit to the Alcheringa crown land finished a most enjoyable week's birding.

Altogether 126 species were recorded, and there were many plants in flower, but in both cases, nothing like what could be seen in a "normal" spring in the Mallee.

We were well looked after, had very enjoyable company, excellent meals, comfortable accommodation, and apart from one car getting stuck on a ridge of sand at the side of a track and having to be towed off by the leader's 4x4, there were no accidents despite sand, dust, sticks and rocks. Something which was a real boon to most these outings was the use of small hand held walkie talkies. For sightings and safety these really were an asset.

On the way home Maggie and I were joined by two of the BOCA members who caught up with us at Hattah. We went off to Hattah Lake with them to have morning tea, and added Regent Parrots to our own sightings, as well as a very close sighting of a pair of Splendid Wrens, two firsts for one of our friends. It was a lovely way to farewell the Mallee.

Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walks

Each week we managed to make a reasonable list of flowering plants but because of the dry conditions there were often only one or two plants of a species instead of the usual numbers. Even the most common orchids have been very hard to find. However some species, such as Wax flowers, Pink Bells, Gold-dust Wattle and Slender-rice Flowers, have flowered well this season.

(To save space botanical names have been omitted if plant was listed on a previous evening walk.)

Wed Sep 27. Native Plant Reserve, Elphinstone. Geraldine Harris
Thin-leaf Wattle *Acacia aculeatissima*, Rough Wattle, Blackwood *A. melanoxylon*, Hedge Wattle *A. paradoxa*, Honey-pots *Acrotriche serrulata*, Rough Star-hair *Astrotriche linearis* ssp1 (in bud), Common Everlasting *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* sp agg, Clustered Everlasting *Chrysocephalum semipapposum*, Common Billy-button *Craspedia variabilis*, Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea *Davesia leptophylla*, Gorse Bitter-pea *Daviesia ulicifolia*, Black-anther Flax-lily *Dianella admixta*, Tall Sundew *Drosera peltata* sp. *auriculata*, Broad-leaf Peppermint *Eucalyptus dives*, Common Cudweed *Euchiton involucratus*, Austral Crane's-bill *Geranium solanderi*, Downy Grevillea *Grevillea alpina*, Purple Coral-pea *Hardenbergia violacea*, Spiky Guinea-flower *Hibbertia exuteacies*, Spiny Headed Mat-rush *Lomandra longifolia*, Grassland Wood-sorrel *Oxalis perennans*, Fairy Wax-flower *Philotheca verrucosa*, Slender Rice-flower *Pimelea linifolia*, Variable Plantain *Plantago varia*, Grey Tussock Grass *Poa sieberiana*, Australian Buttercup *Ranunculus lappaceus*, Creamy Candles *Stackhousia monogyna*, Pink Bells *Tetratheca ciliata*, Early Nancy *Wurmbea dioica*. Also Flame Robin and Eastern Spinebill.

Wed Oct 11. Crocodile Reservoir Track. Chris Morris

Gold-dust Wattle *Acacia acinacea*, Silver Wattle *Acacia dealbata*, Hedge Wattle, Wirilda Wattle *Acacia retinodes* var *retinodes*, Honey-pots, Daphne Heath *Brachyloma daphnoides*, Milkmaids *Burchardia umbellata*, Musky Hood *Caladenia gracilis*, Common Billy Button, Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea, Black-anther Flax-lily, Red Box *Eucalyptus polyanthemos* s *vestita*, Bedstraw *Galium* sp, Black's Goodenia *Goodenia blackiana*, Purple Coral-pea, Grey Everlasting *Ozothamnus obcordatus*, Fairy Wax-flower, Slender Rice-flower, Handsome Flat-pea *Platylobium formosum*, Creamy Candles, Pink Bells, Sticky Everlasting *Xerochrysum viscosum*.

Also White-throated Treecreeper, Dusky Woodswallow, Spotted Pardalote.

Wed Oct 18. Morgans Track. Richard Piesse

Chocolate Lily *Arthropodium strictum*, Daphne Heath, Coarse Dodder-laurel *Cassytha melantha*, White Everlasting *Chrysocephalum baxteri*, Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea, Black-anther Flax-lily, Showy Parrot-pea *Dillwynia sericea*, Red Box, Common Wedge-pea *Gompholobium Huegii*, Black's Goodenia, Downy Grevillea, Heath Tea-tree *Letospermum myrsinoides*, Common Beard-heath *Leucopogen virgatus*, Grey Everlasting, Fairy Wax-flower, Slender Rice-flower, Handsome Flat-pea, White Marianth *Rhytidosporum procumbens*, Creamy Candles, Grass Trigger-plant *Stylidium ameria*, Pink Bells, Bluebell *Wahlenbergia* sp, Sticky Everlasting.

BOCA Bird Challenge Count – Saturday 2 December, 2006.

Who can take part? Anyone can. We need at least three teams, each of three or four people to cover the area thoroughly. You do not need to be an expert – we need ears, eyes and recorders. Each team will have an experienced leader.

What is the aim of the count? The aim is to see as many species of bird as possible within a 40km radius of Castlemaine, and count the numbers of each species. For a bird to be counted, it must be identified by at least two people by sight or three people by sound. That is why we need teams. Sightings by a sole observer cannot be counted.

Meet at the Old Tourist Information Centre opposite the Castle Motel at 8.15am for an 8.30am start.

How long will it take? We usually have all-day teams and half-day teams. All day people take snacks and lunch. Half-day people bring morning or afternoon tea. All bring binoculars. Return to the Old Information Centre by 5.30pm. For half-day trips, lunch is between 12.15pm and 1.00 pm.

Other years. CFNC has been taking part for many years. We do much the same area each year, so the bird count can be compared year by year, and we get a picture of whether bird numbers are increasing or not. It is a very enjoyable day. It does not require high speed travelling – it is hard to see birds at high speed. Because many other groups are taking part, bird numbers can be compared across the nation.

How to register. Please give me your name by Thursday 30 November, so teams can be arranged.

Ern Perkins 5472 3124

Postcard from Kalbarri, WA. 17/10/06

Dear Friends,

Just a line to let you know that we are both well and still enjoying our BIG trip. Over 9 months and 20,000 km down the track we have loved the northern coast of WA and have enjoyed the abundance of wildflowers, Mulla Mulla and Sturt's Pea galore. The wildflower season in the south is the worst for years. Only 2" rain fell – normally 10-12". But a lot of the flowering shrubs are still out and lovely. We have had some great bird species including Thick-billed Grasswren, Rufous Calamanthus, and Blue-breasted Wren among many. 390 species for the trip so far. The coastal weather has now turned very windy every day. Quite unpleasant.

Our Best wishes to all,
Ken and Maureen Dredge.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club.

Observations

28/9 On way home from FN committee meeting an owl flew across in front of car and landed on post nearby – car lights revealed a **Southern Boobook**. **Fantailed Cuckoo** calling about the house, too. Early October, in Green Gully, on way to Glenlyon, a **Pallid Cuckoo** and a **Satin Flycatcher**. Chris Morris
Grampians: Stilts at Lake Lonsdale even though there is no water there. Wonderful display of Red-beaked Orchids, Tiny Bluebells and Button Everlastings at Pomonal. Rita Mills

Magpies: Repeatedly bathing in newly cleaned and filled birdbath. A. Dorman
12/10 On very hot Thursday, magpies bathing in water bowl and then lying with wings spread out on ground to dry? 17/10 Young magpie rescued from VicRoads Freeway site and placed in adjacent trees on private land. G Harris

Barkers Creek: Mudlarks nesting, 7 Wood Ducks, 2 Black Ducks and 1 Australasian Grebe on dam; Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Grey Fantails along creek; 20+ White-browed Woodswallows overhead and a flock of Purple-crowned Lorikeets in Yellow Box; and two swans and three cygnets on dam at Muckleford. Geraldine and Geoff Harris

Erin Court: 15/10 50+ White-browed Woodswallows on block & Golf Course this morning. Also some sort of quail a few days later at Erin Crt. Deb Worland

Snakes: Two feet long brown snake dead on road. Helen Morris

Metre long tiger snake on library steps but slithered away down drainpipe by time snake catcher arrived. Ann van Gemert.

Red-bellied Black Snake at edge of dam on U3A walk with bulges of latest prey showing in the stomach. Rita Mills

From Maldon: 18/10 A pair of **Rainbow Bee Eaters** in Maldon. Also on my way home from Castlemaine, I stopped to admire a **family of Black Swans** (mum, dad, and 3 cygnets) on a dam just along from the turn off to Maldon from the Maryborough road. Also enjoying the dam were a pair of **Dusky Moorhens**, a little **Pied Cormorant**, a **Eurasian Coot**, and a **Hoary headed Grebe** - not a bad selection in one sighting! Gill Rayner, Maldon.
Pair of **Wood Ducks** with eleven offspring in the Botanic Gardens. G. Broadway
Flock of **Straw-necked Ibis** and one **Australian White Ibis** in paddock in Blakeley Road. Rita Mills

White-faced Heron seen catching fish in Lynches dam in Brown St. A. Dorman
25/10 Wednesday walkers were treated to a close-up view of **Gang Gang Cockatoos** on their Dry Diggings walk near Daylesford. And after the walkers had departed for home, **two echidnas** on edge of the track. Richard Piesse

More echidnas: 25/10 Echidna trying to cross Midland Highway 10pm. Found dead on other side of road following Monday. Geraldine Harris

Returning from Warrnambool noticed a teenager on side of road intent on escorting an echidna off the road and out of harms way. George Broadway

Eltham Copper Butterfly – Caterpillar Count.

In an attempt to identify which plants are actually used by the Eltham Copper Butterfly caterpillar and therefore the best plants to propagate from for further plantings (see item CN September 2006, p4), CFNC members have carried out three searches. Members who have attended these evening searches in the butterfly area of the Botanic Gardens have been disappointed each time to find no caterpillars. Further searches will be held when it is butterfly season in the hope of discovering that the butterflies are still present at this site.

However, last Tuesday evening (Oct 31), having failed to find any caterpillars at the Gardens site, the searchers adjourned to a sight at Kalimna where 160 caterpillars had been found on the Monday evening. Those of us who had not previously sighted the caterpillars were able to see them at last! It was quite exciting to see these elusive caterpillars and their accompanying ants out feeding on the *Bursaria spinosa*. Photos are good but there is nothing like seeing the real thing!

Geraldine Harris

If you find an injured native animal....

Contact the following people in this order.

1. Contact your local vet – they will provide service free of charge for such cases
2. Contact Wildlife Rescue Information Service (WRIN) Phone 041 935 6433
3. Contact Newstead Wildlife Shelter – Barry and Dawn Angus 5476 2580 or 0428 571 752. This is the only rescue shelter in the Mt Alexander Shire and they are presently filled to capacity.

Website Request. Ern still requires photos of street trees. Member contributions and excursion reports would be very welcome.

From the Business Meeting 26/10/06

- **Welcome to new members:** Julie Hurley and Hugh and Sally Mellor.

1. CFNC has purchased an ACER computer and digital projector with funds received from Parks Vic for important survey work carried out at Eureka Reef under the leadership of Ern Perkins. This equipment will be available for other environmental groups to use with CFNC member to operate it.

Photos taken at Eureka Reef are still required for this project.

2. Five members collected eight bags of rubbish at the Roadside Cleanup.

3. The Club is looking at best way to proceed with a Mammal Trapping Programme to be carried out under the guidance of member, Albert Golden.

4. 27/10 Survey of Reserve in Muckleford School Road carried out as part of a new survey programme of small nature blocks aimed at recording species numbers and abundance in attempt to record how the 'Bush is Changing'.

5. Deana Marshall (Vic Environmental Assessment Council) wrote inviting responses to a discussion paper on Murray River Red Gum Forests". Comments until Dec 7 2006. www.redgum.org.au or www.melbourne.foe.org.au/barmah

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

November 2006

General meetings (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Excursions (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the carpark opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at 27 Doveton Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS.

Fri Nov 10. Canadian Parks and Global Warming. Phil Ingamells, Victorian National Parks Association. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat Nov 11. Black Hill Reserve, Kyneton. Leader: Albert Golden Ph 5423 9278. Depart from carpark opposite motel in Duke St at 1.30pm sharp or make own way to Black Hill and meet at the entrance of Black Hill Reserve at 2.15pm. BYO afternoon tea and drink.

Sat Dec 2. Annual BOCA Bird Challenge Count. Bird spotters wanted to assist experts to find as many different species as possible. Register by Nov 30 so teams can be arranged. (See details on page 5). Contact: Ern Perkins Ph 54723124 by Nov 30. An excellent introduction to bird watching.

Fri Dec 8. Members Night. Traditional "Show and Tell" night. Bring along a short slideshow (10 slides), an interesting nature experience, a list of questions etc. Be as creative as you like. Digital and Slide projector available for use on the night (Digital images need to be in either JPEG or PowerPoint format on CD or USB key). Bring a plate of supper to share. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat Dec 9. Christmas Outing – Harcourt Reservoir. (Details in December)

Sat Jan 13 Dawn Breakfast – Chinaman's Point, Chewton. BYO breakfast and binoculars (Details in December)

2006 Committee

Rita Mills (Pres).....	Ph 5472 4553	George Broadway (Sec)....	Ph 5472 2513
Hans van Gemert (Treas/ Public Off)...	Ph.5472 1082	Ern Perkins (Web).....	Ph.5472 3124
Noela Cain.....	Ph 5470 6223	Athol Dorman.....	Ph .5472 4429
Chris Morris.....	Ph 9885 4221	Richard Piesse.....	Ph.5472 3191
Geraldine Harris (Editor).....	Ph. 5474 2244,	PO Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450,	

gedharris@castlemaine.net

Subscriptions for 2006 (Screensaver with each 2006 membership \$2 postage)

Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19, Family \$24

The subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, *Castlemaine Naturalist*.

Website: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~cfnc>

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc., PO Box 324, Castlemaine. Inc #A0003010B